STEP INTO READING

reading on your own

STEP 3

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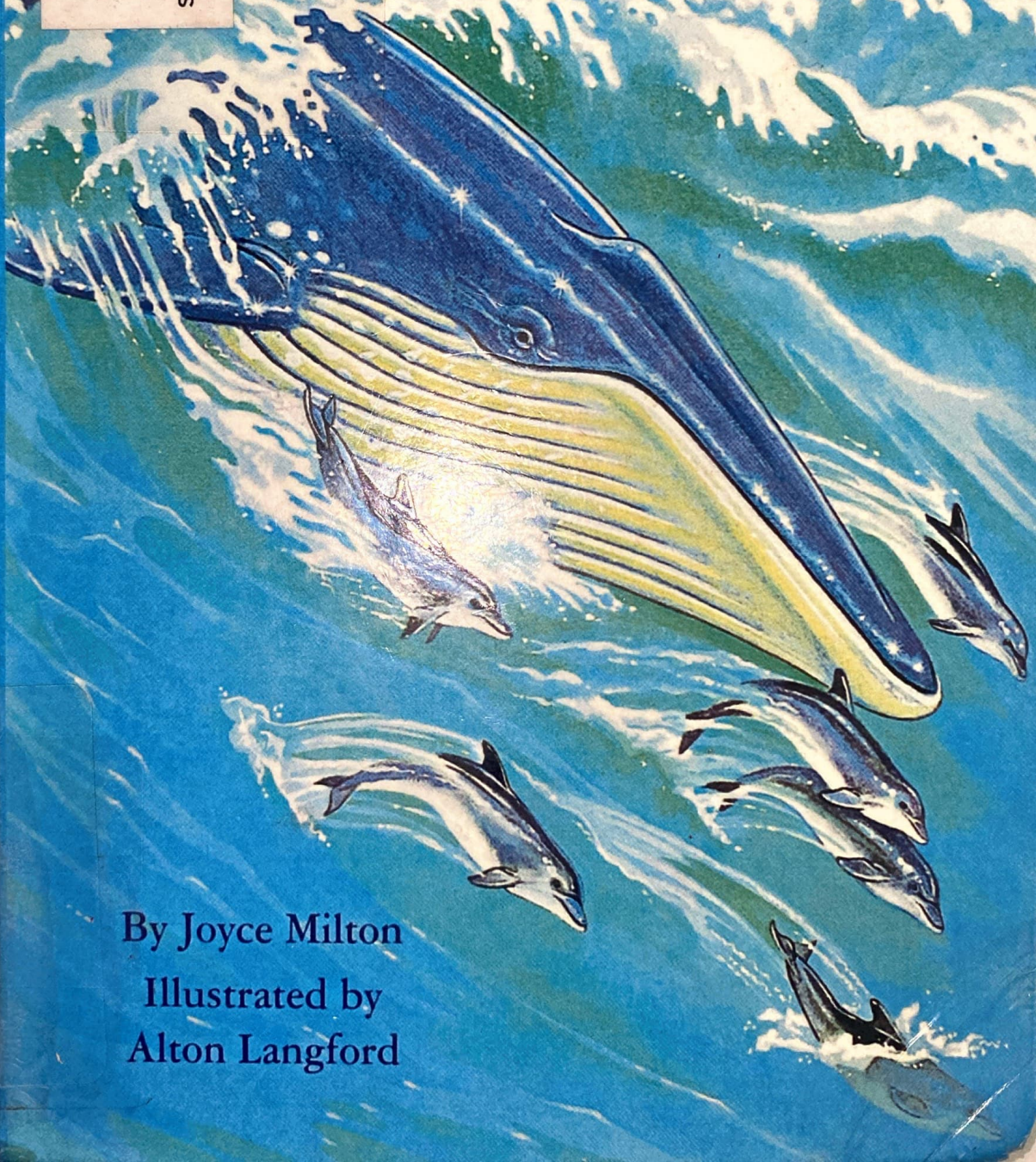
Whales : the gentle giants

WHALES

The Gentle Giants



By Joyce Milton

Illustrated by
Alton Langford

Dear Parent:

Congratulations! Your child is taking the first steps on an exciting journey. The destination? Independent reading!

STEP INTO READING® will help your child get there. The program offers five steps to reading success. Each step includes fun stories and colorful art. There are also Step into Reading Sticker Books, Step into Reading Math Readers, Step into Reading Write-In Readers, Step into Reading Phonics Readers, and Step into Reading Phonics First Steps! Boxed Sets—a complete literacy program with something for every child.

Learning to Read, Step by Step!

Ready to Read *Preschool–Kindergarten*
• big type and easy words • rhyme and rhythm • picture clues
For children who know the alphabet and are eager to begin reading.

Reading with Help *Preschool–Grade 1*
• basic vocabulary • short sentences • simple stories
For children who recognize familiar words and sound out new words with help.

Reading on Your Own *Grades 1–3*
• engaging characters • easy-to-follow plots • popular topics
For children who are ready to read on their own.

Reading Paragraphs *Grades 2–3*
• challenging vocabulary • short paragraphs • exciting stories
For newly independent readers who read simple sentences with confidence.

Ready for Chapters *Grades 2–4*
• chapters • longer paragraphs • full-color art
For children who want to take the plunge into chapter books but still like colorful pictures.

STEP INTO READING® is designed to give every child a successful reading experience. The grade levels are only guides. Children can progress through the steps at their own speed, developing confidence in their reading, no matter what their grade.

Remember, a lifetime love of reading starts with a single step!

For John
—J.M.

To Susan Fidler
—A.L.

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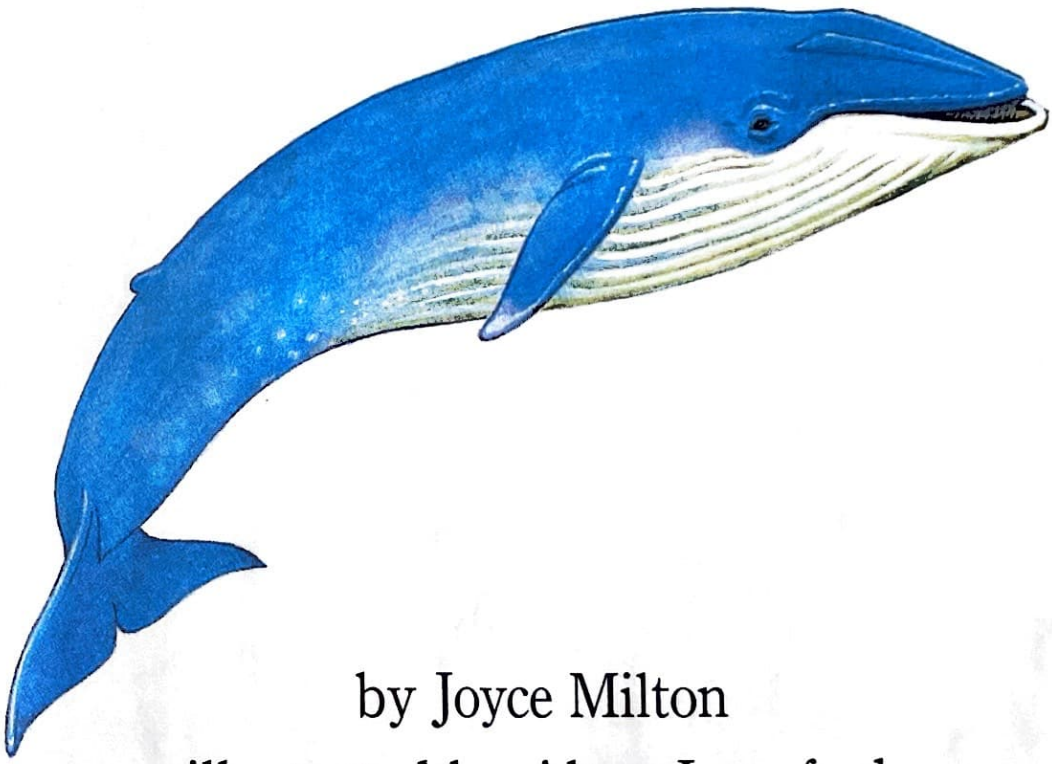
STEP INTO READING®

STEP 3

WHALES

The Gentle Giants



by Joyce Milton
illustrated by Alton Langford

Random House New York

Hundreds of years ago
people believed
in sea monsters.
All kinds of sea monsters.

One story was told
about a man named Brendan.
Brendan and his friends
went to sea in a small boat.
They sailed and sailed.
Soon they were lost.

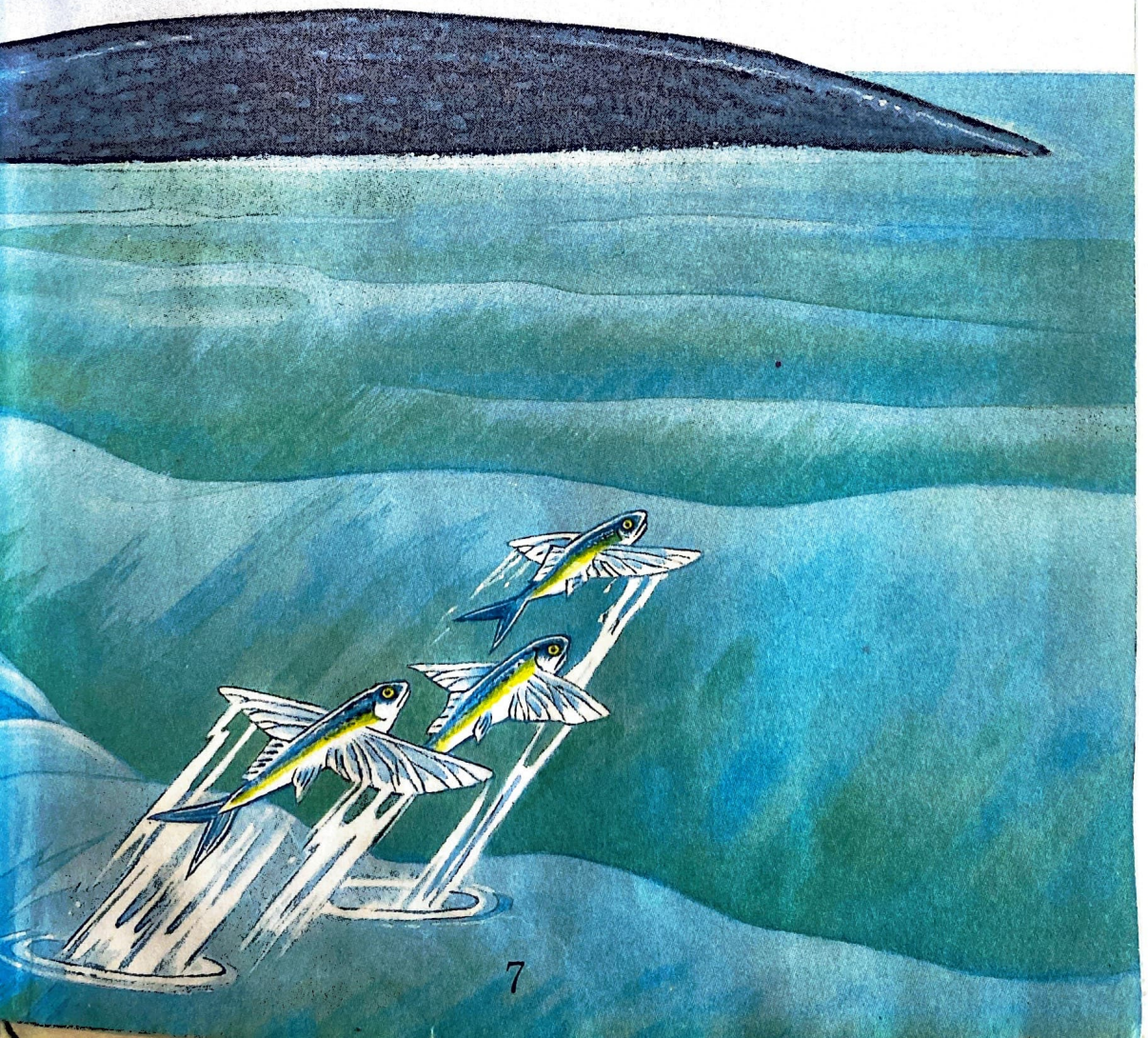
At last they saw an island.

"We are saved!"

cried Brendan.

"Let's land right away.

We will give thanks to God."



Brendan and his friends
started to pray.
Suddenly the island began to move.
It was alive!
Was it a sea monster?
No!
The men were standing
on the back of a whale!
They were so scared,
they jumped back into their boat.
And off they went
as fast as they could.

Is this a true story?

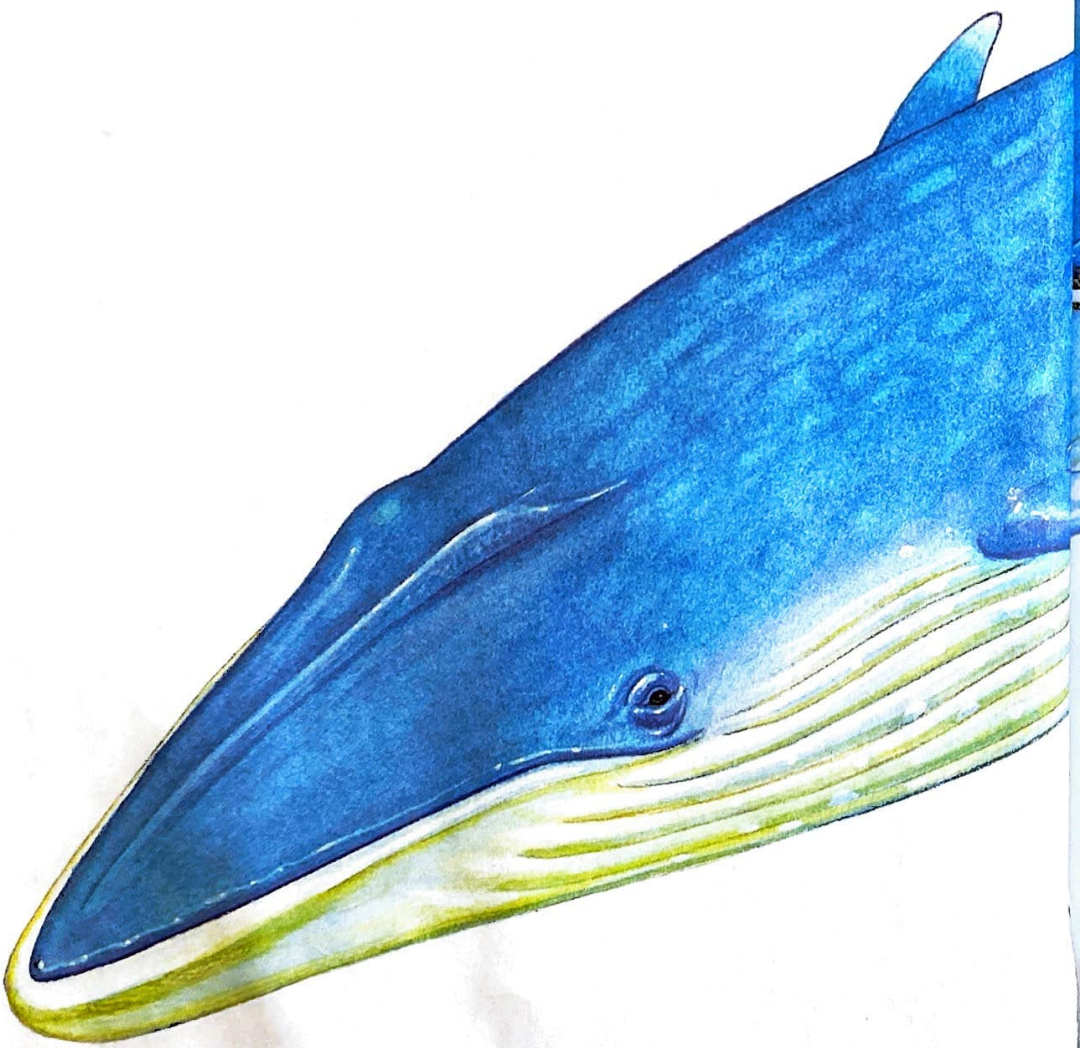
Probably not.

But some whales are

as big as small islands.

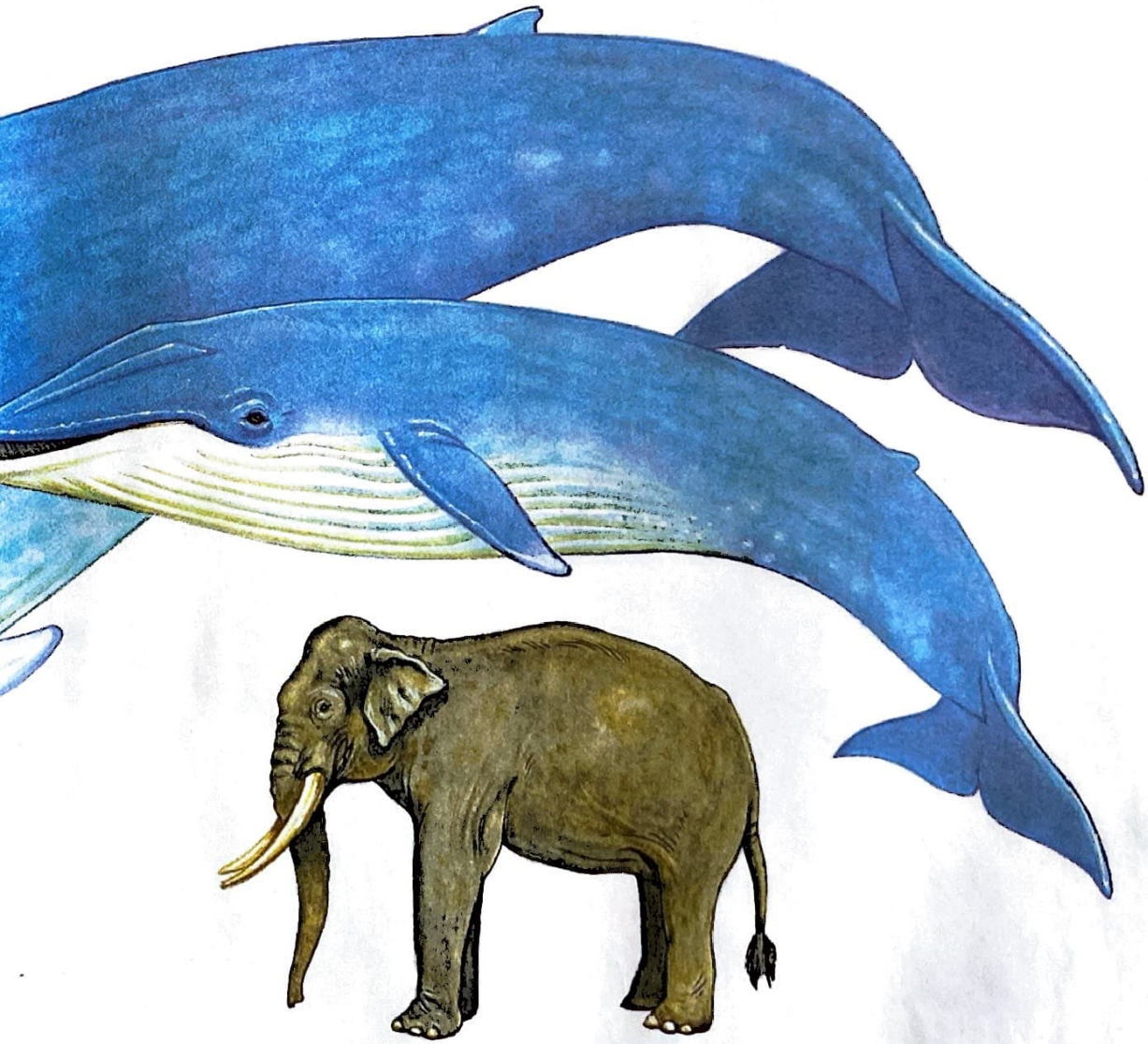
The blue whale is the biggest

of all whales.



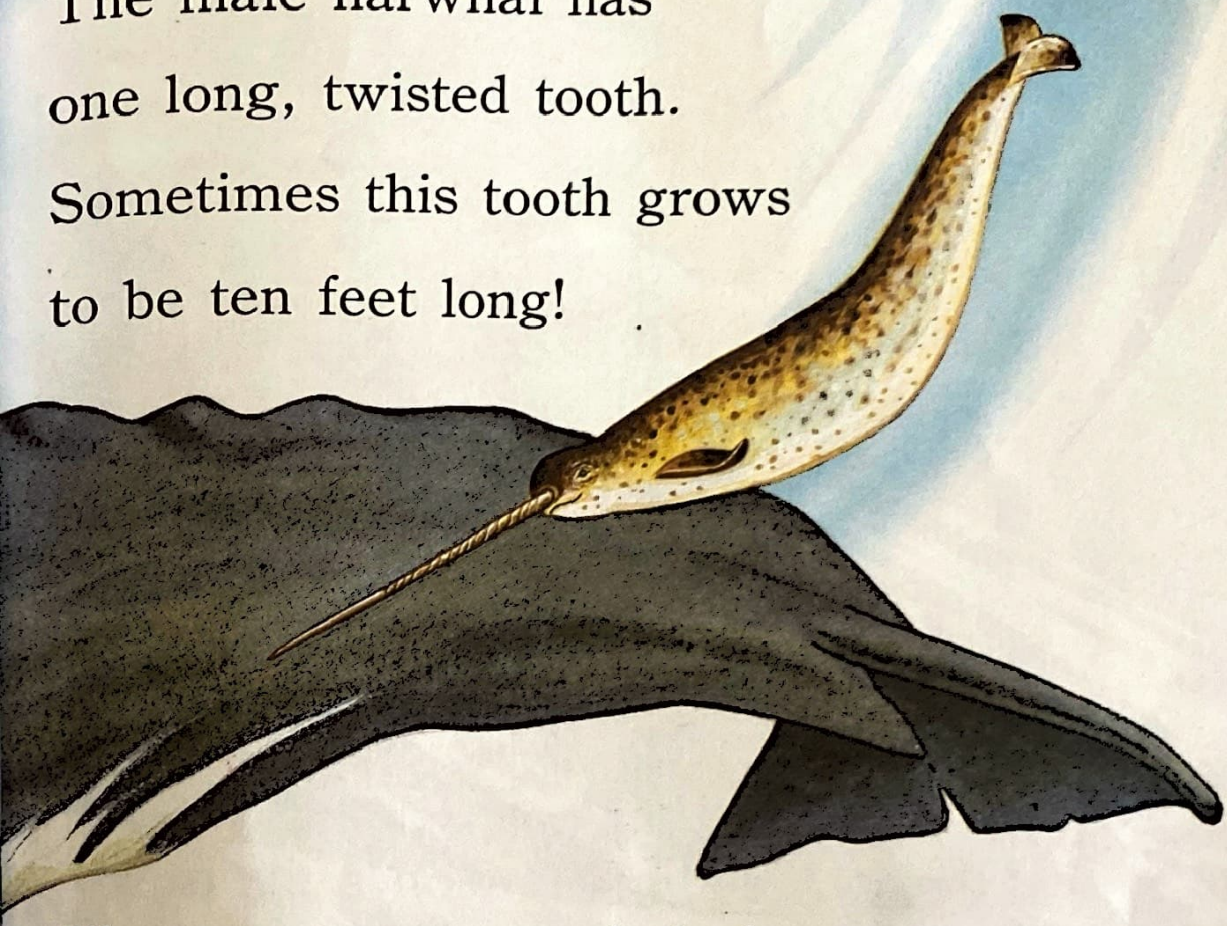
The blue whale is also the biggest animal in the world.

A baby blue whale is even bigger than an elephant.

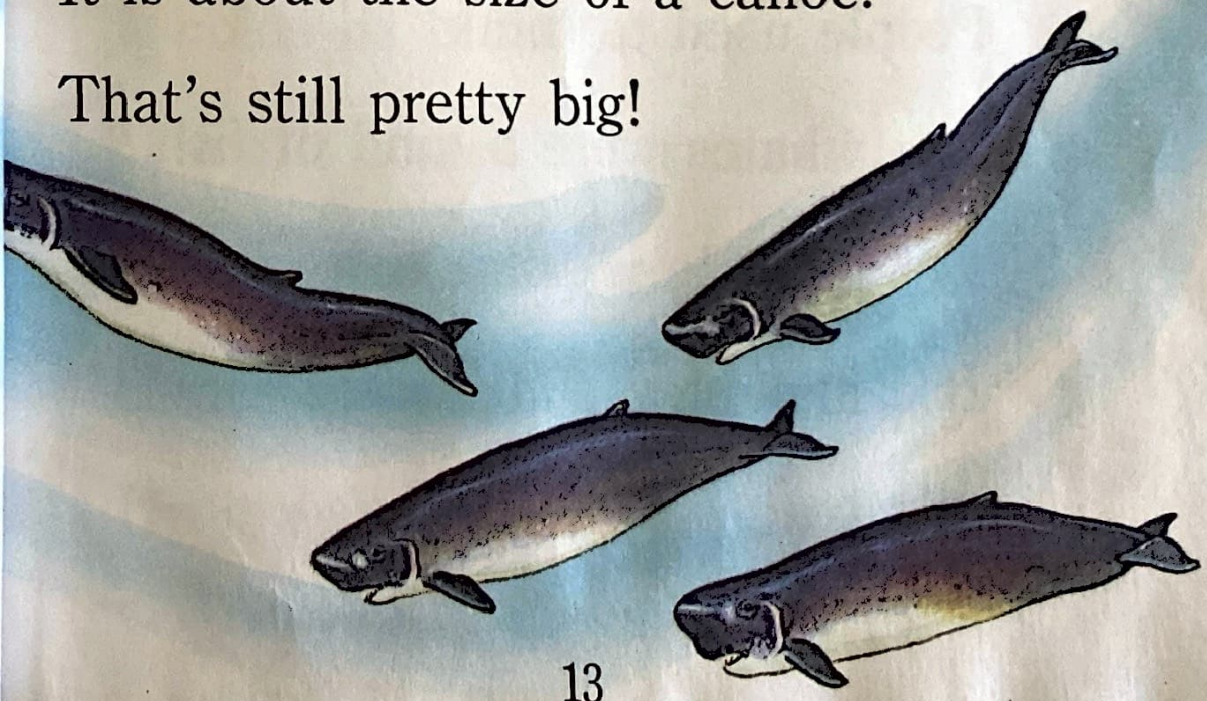


There are about
seventy-five different kinds
of whales.
The sperm whale
has a huge head.

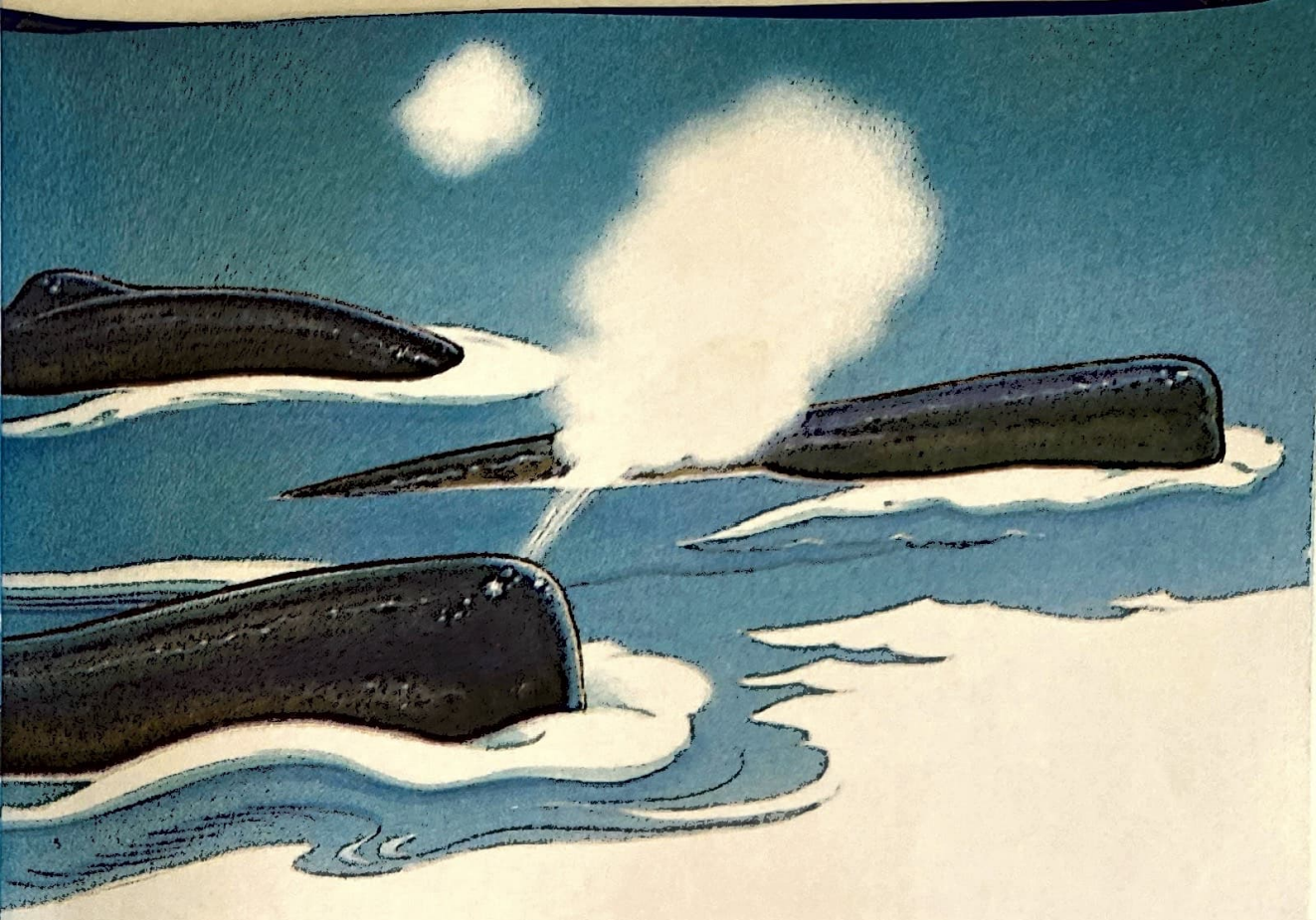
The male narwhal has
one long, twisted tooth.
Sometimes this tooth grows
to be ten feet long!



The pygmy sperm whale is
one of the smallest whales.
It is about the size of a canoe.
That's still pretty big!



People used to think
that whales were a kind of fish.
But a whale is not a fish.
It cannot stay underwater
all the time.



A whale breathes
through a hole in its head.
This is called a blowhole.
When a whale dives,
it holds its breath.
When it comes up, it breathes out.
A big spout of spray
comes out of its blowhole.
Up it goes, high in the air.

A whale is a mammal.

Just like a dog.

Just like a cat.

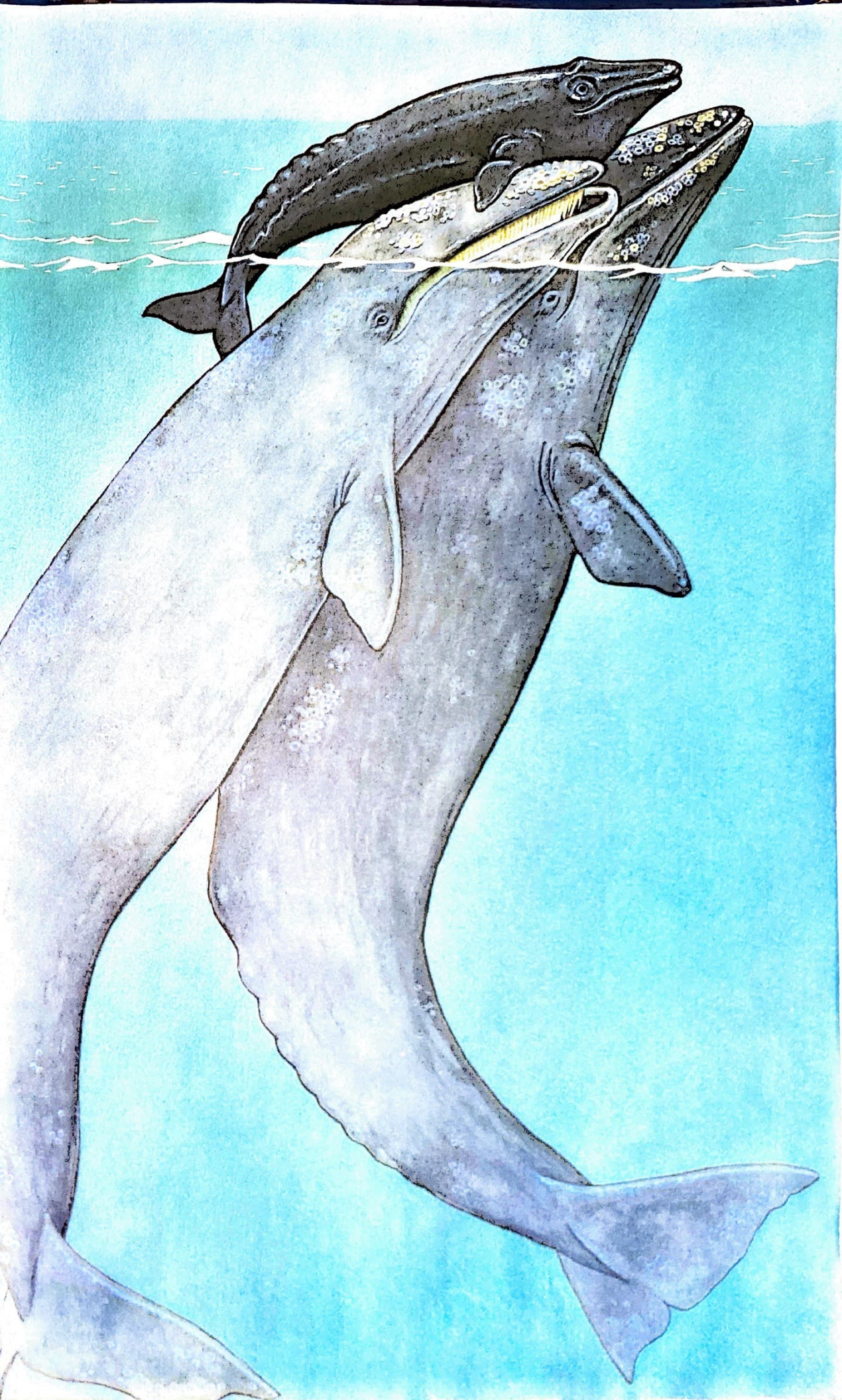
Just like you!

A baby mammal grows inside its mother's body.

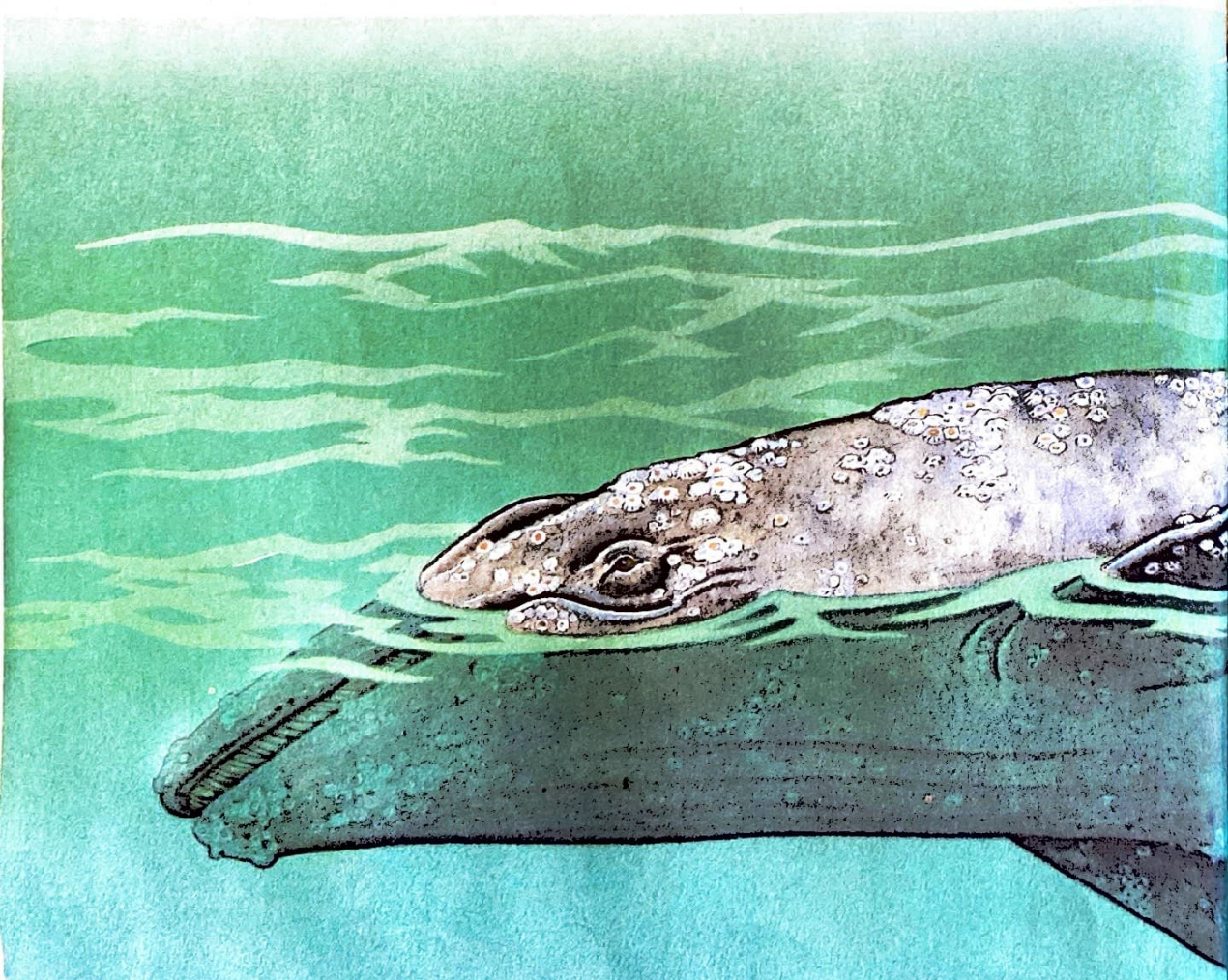
This baby gray whale has just been born.

Its mother and another whale quickly push the baby to the top of the water.

They are helping the little whale take its first breath of air.



The baby whale is called a calf.
It drinks its mother's milk
just as a human baby does.
It weighs about 2,000 pounds.
But to its mother
it is still her little baby.



Usually whales are gentle.

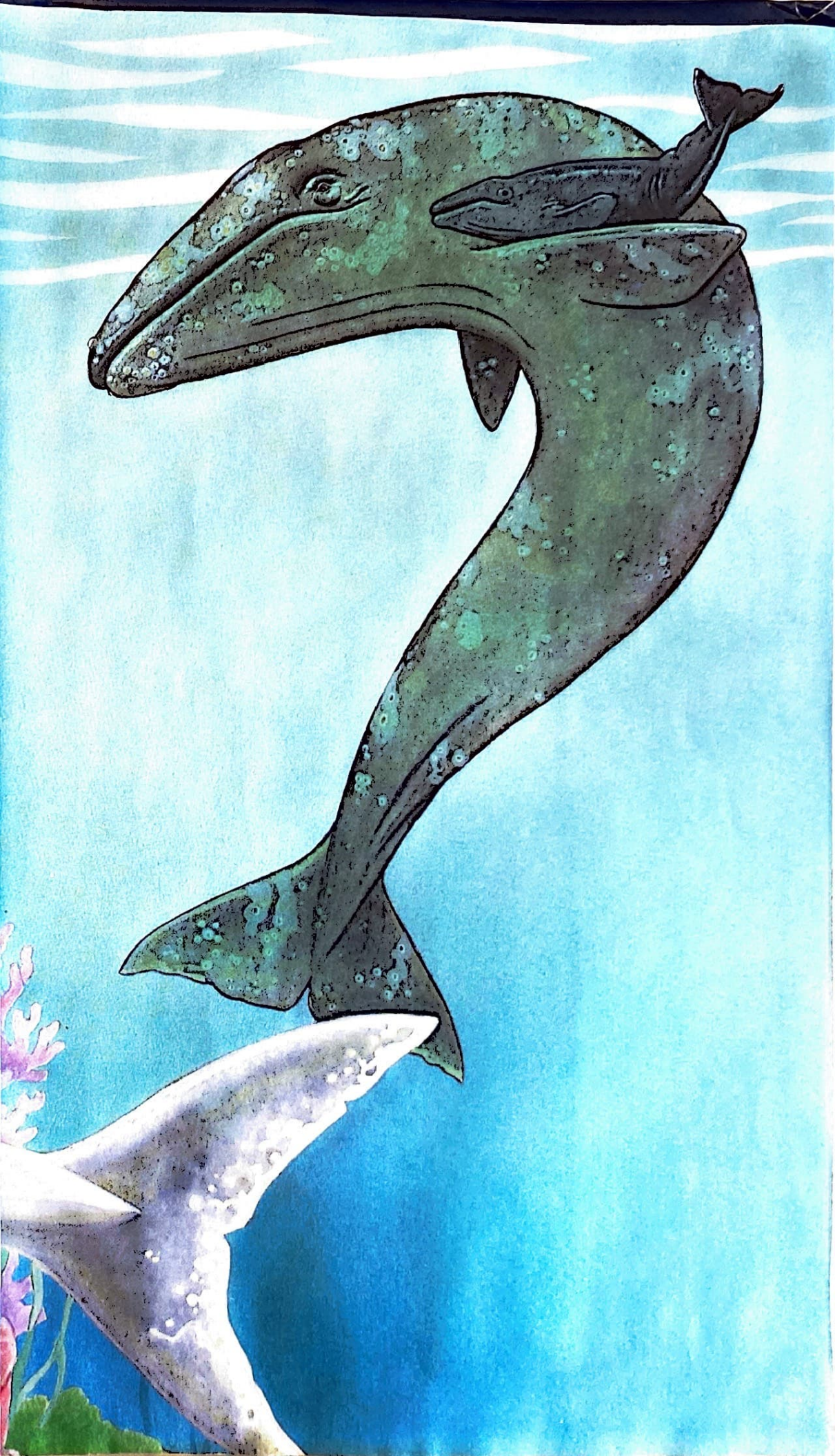
But not always.

The mother gray whale

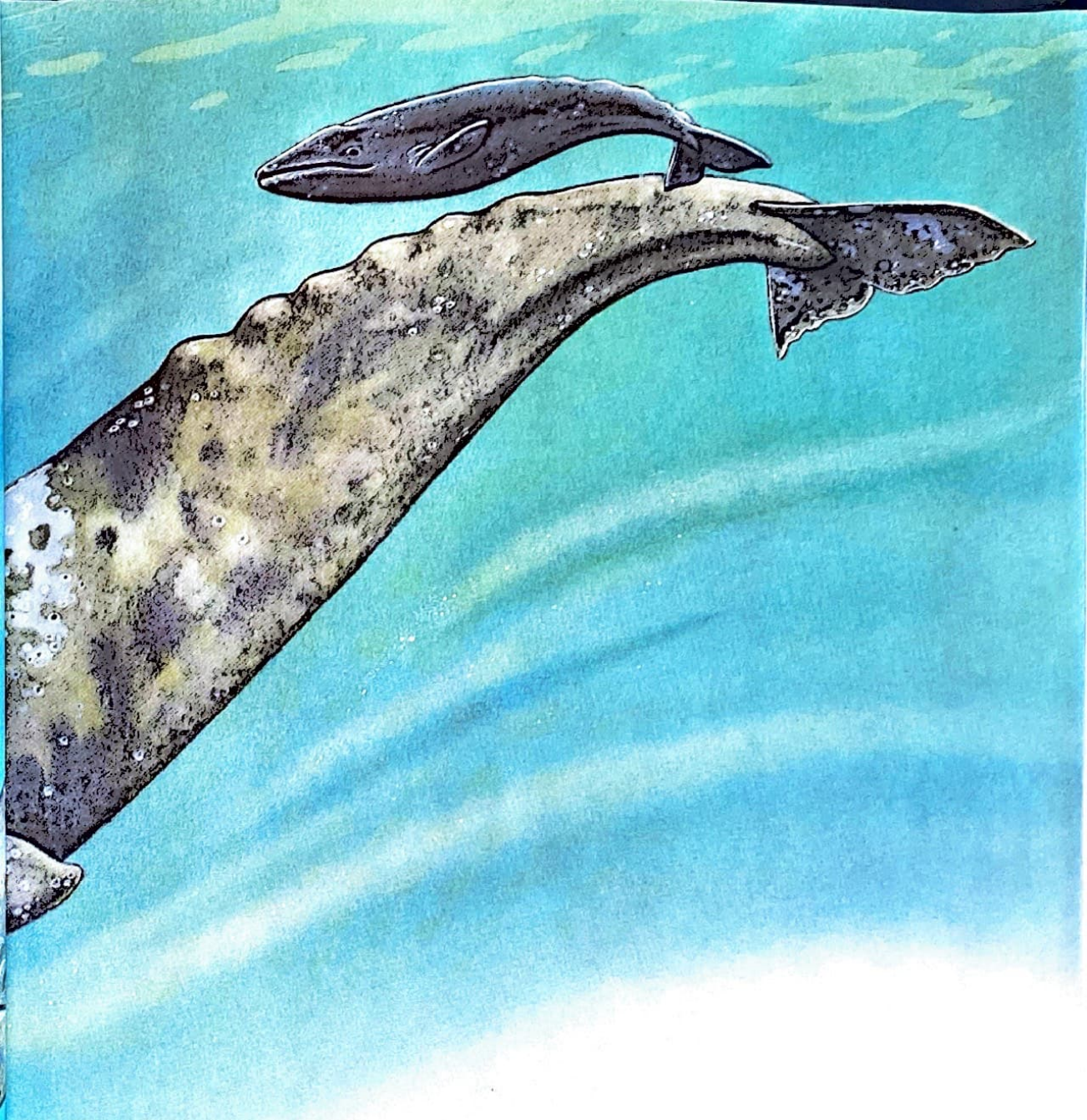
will fight anything

that tries to hurt her calf.

The whale calf
cannot swim very fast.
A big, hungry shark is watching.
It is waiting
for a chance to attack.



But the mother whale is keeping watch too.



When she sees the shark,
she rushes straight at it.

Other whales come to help.

They swim between the shark

and the baby.

They are too big for the shark to attack

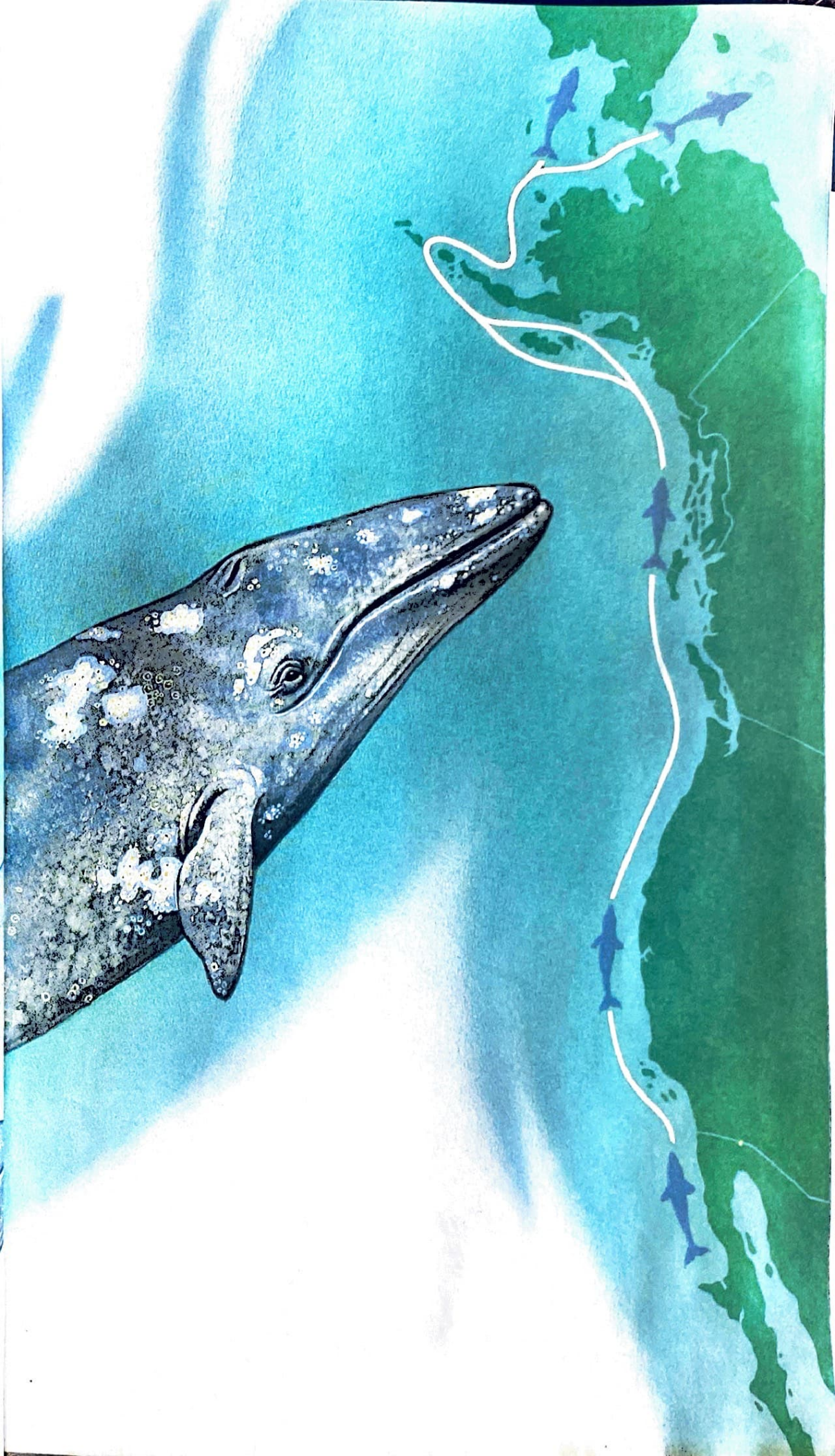
The shark is not very smart.

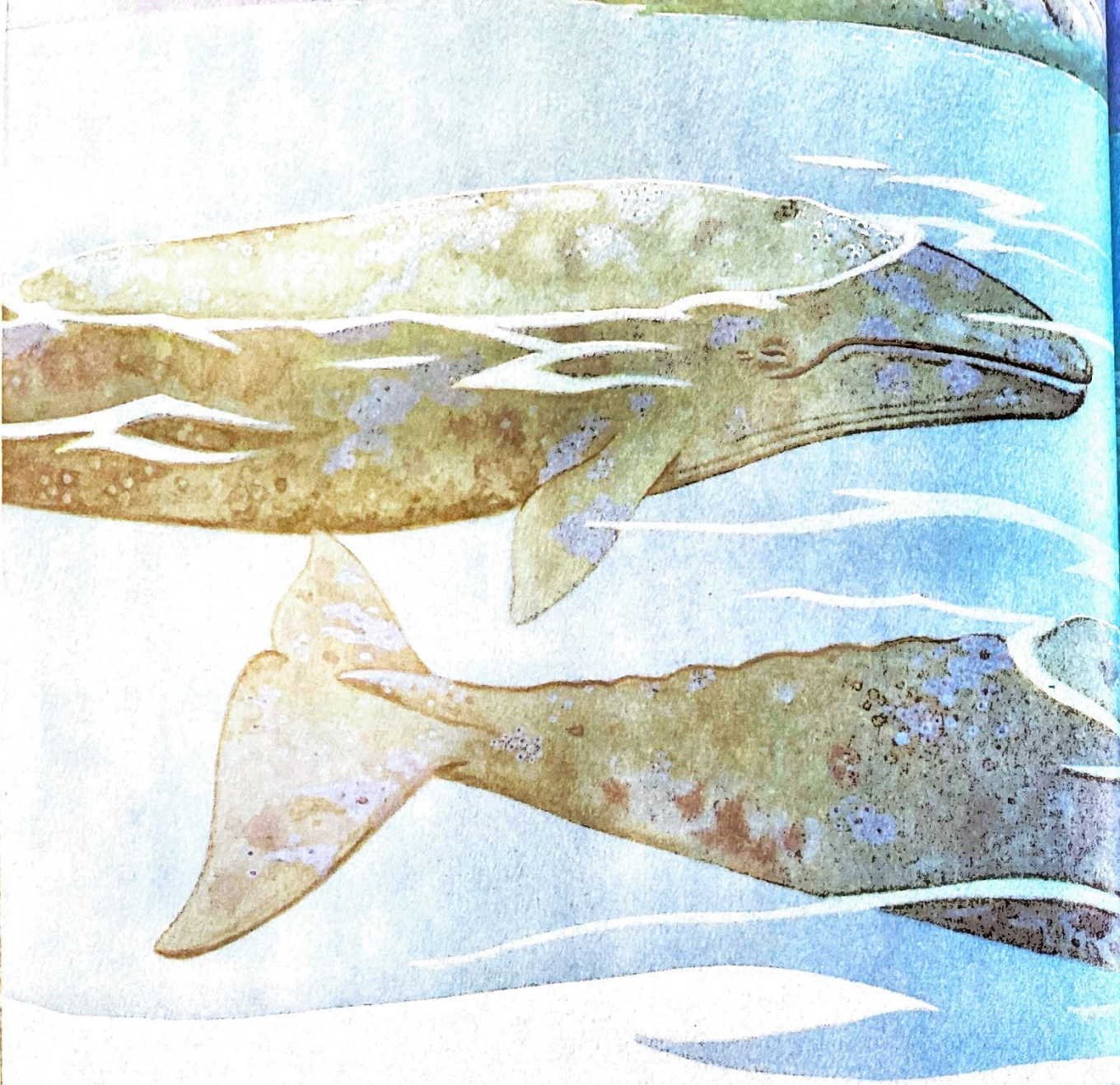
Soon it is all mixed up.

It gives up and swims away.

The calf is safe.

All winter long
the baby gray whale swims and plays
in the warm waters
off the coast of Mexico.
But when spring comes,
the gray whales are on the move.
They will swim all the way
to cold Arctic waters.
Even the baby whale will make
the long trip.





They swim day and night.

But sometimes even a whale gets tired

When the whales are sleepy,

they lie on top of the water

and take naps.

After their long trip

the gray whales are very hungry.

The cold water is filled

with their favorite food–

tiny sea animals,

so small you would not think

they could feed a whale.

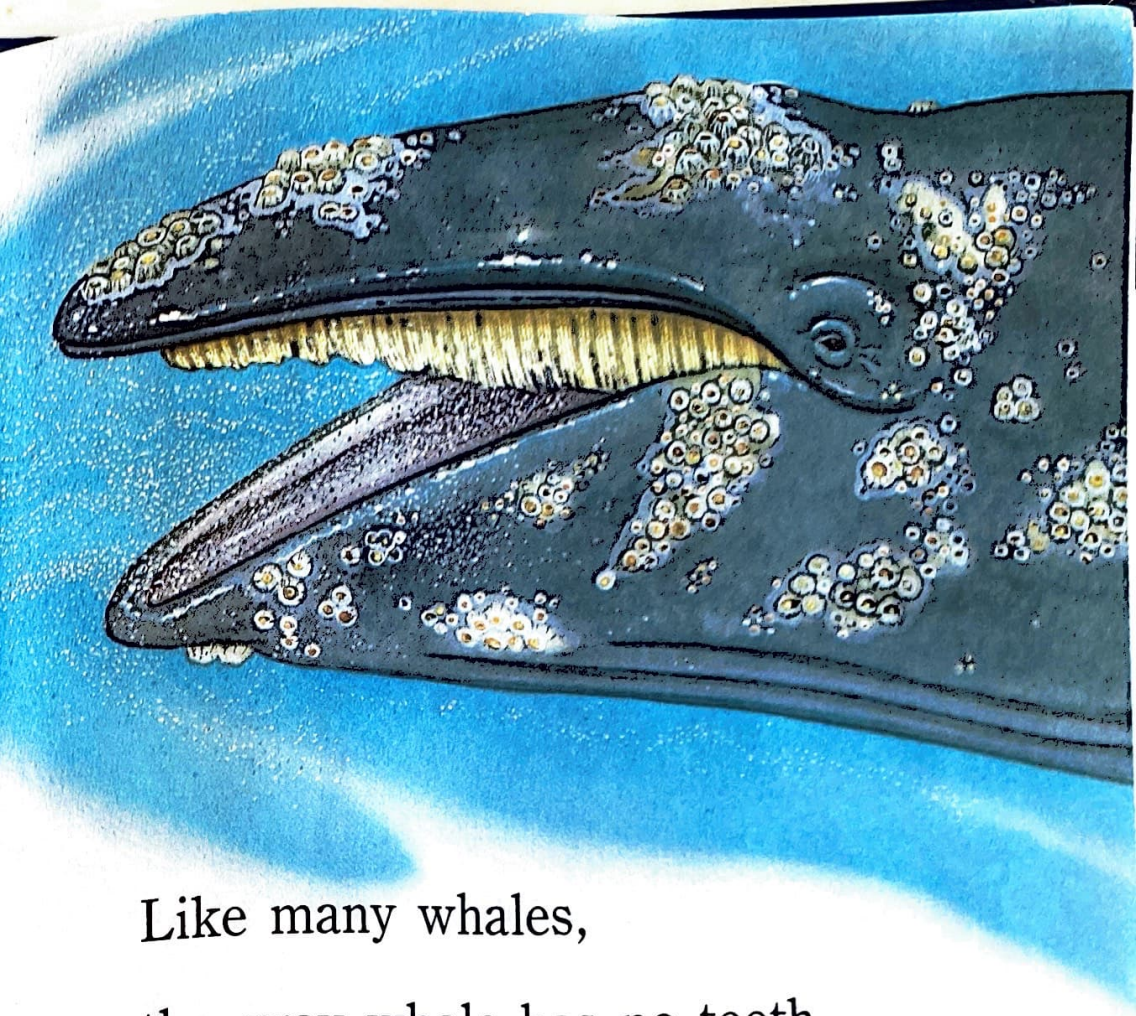
But they do.

The whales open their mouths wide.

SLURP!

They take in lots of water.

And *lots* of tiny sea animals too.



Like many whales,

the gray whale has no teeth.

Instead it has baleen.

The baleen grows in long strips.

It works like a big strainer.

When a whale spits out

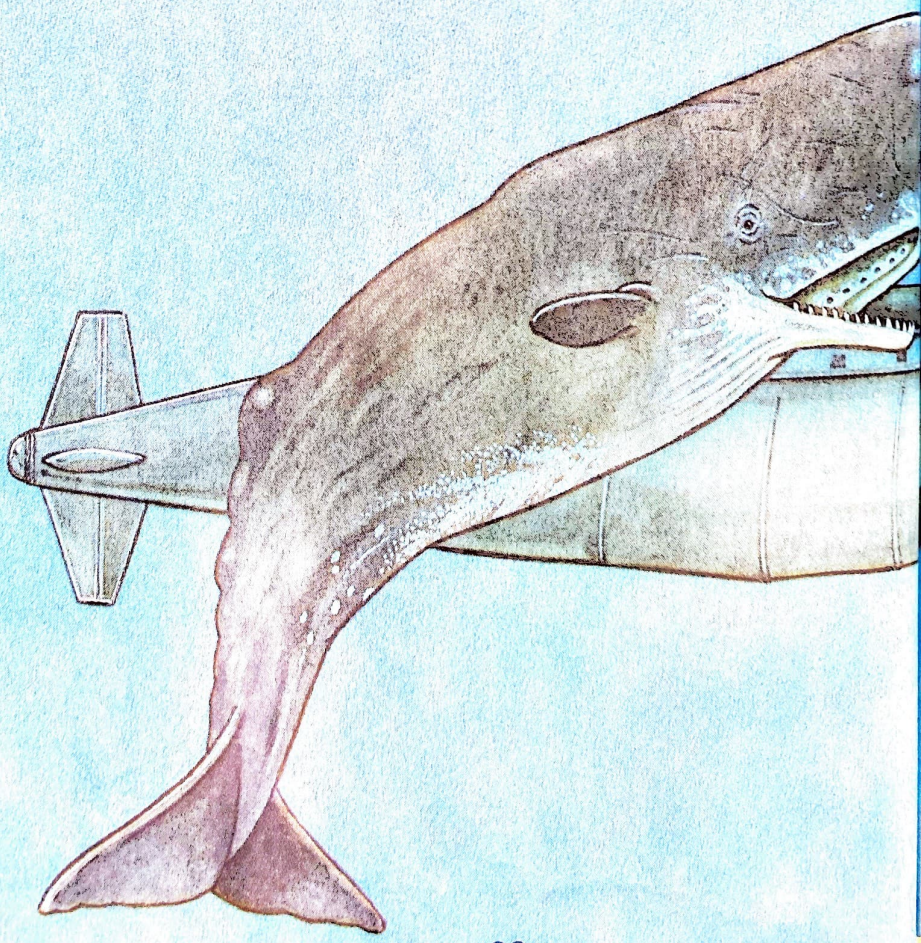
a mouthful of water,

lots of the tiny sea animals

stay caught in its baleen.

They will be the whale's dinner.

People did not always know
that whales make sounds.
Sailors in submarines
used to hear strange things:
CLICKETY-CLICK! CRRRACK!



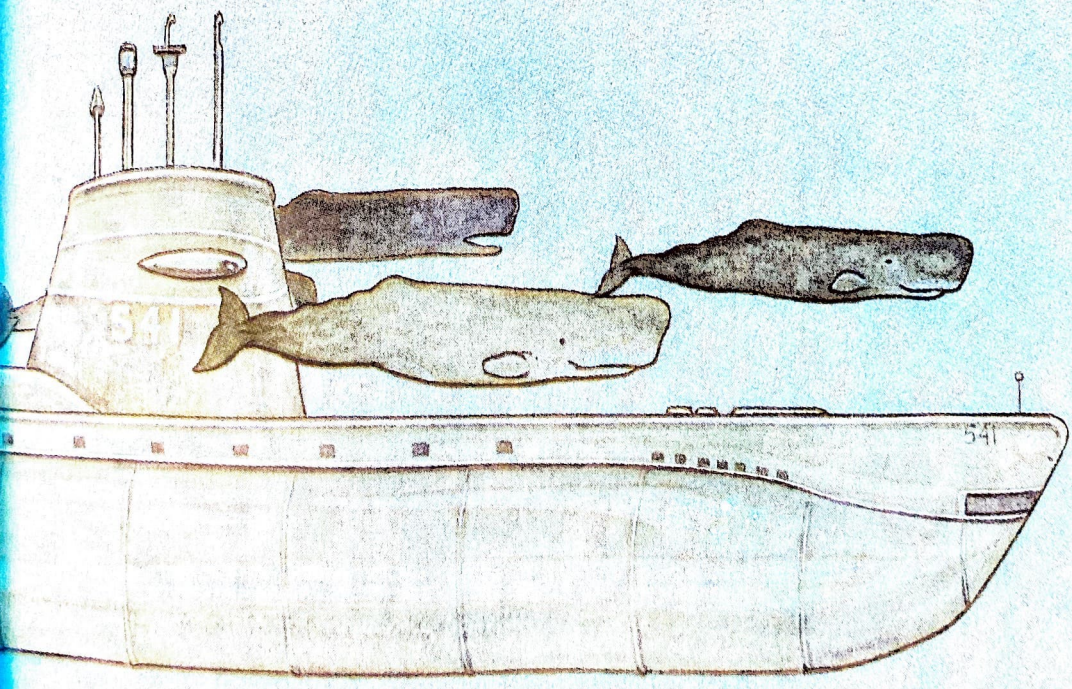
The noises sounded

like music from outer space.

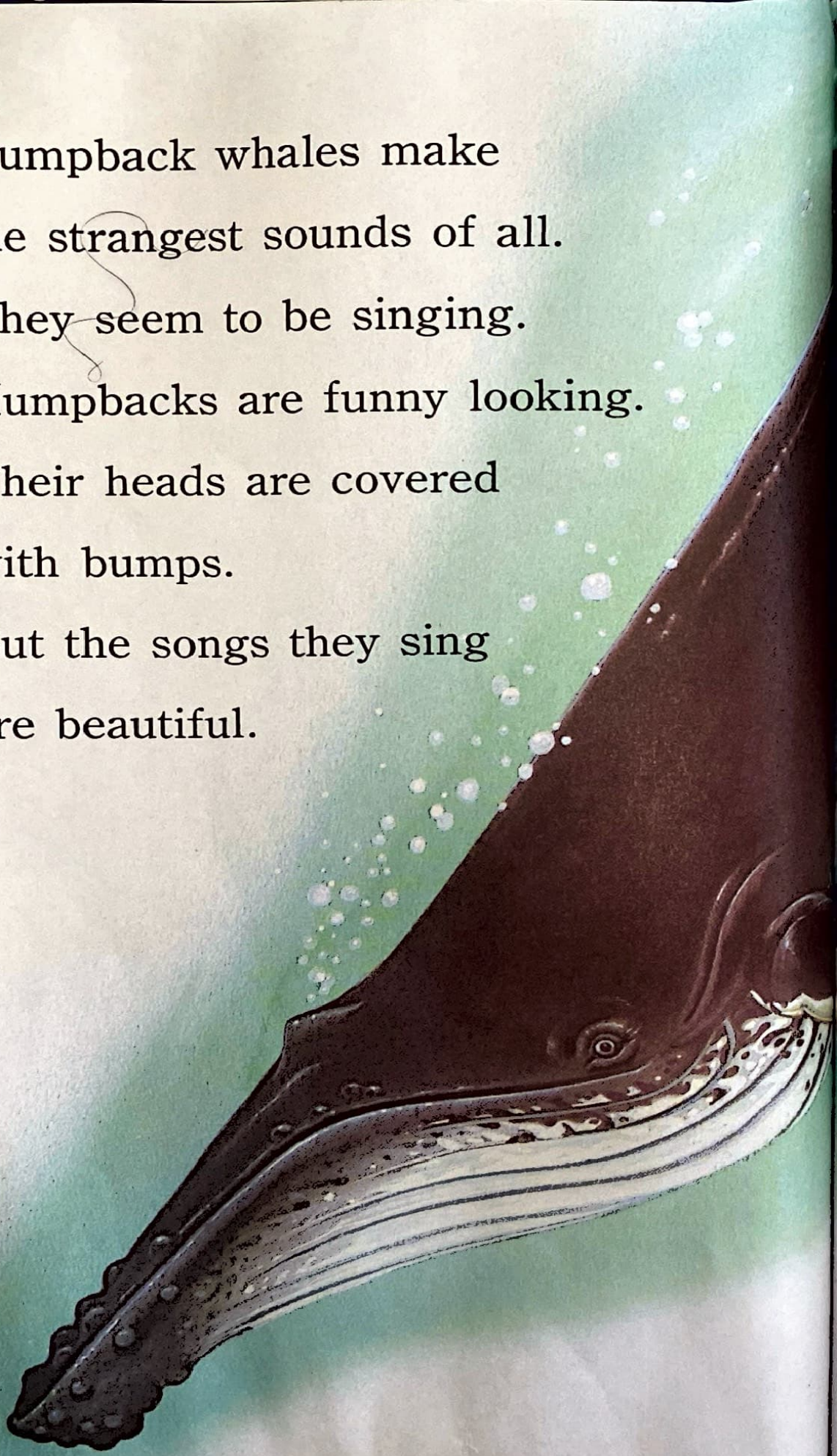
The sailors were surprised to learn

that all those sounds

were made by whales.

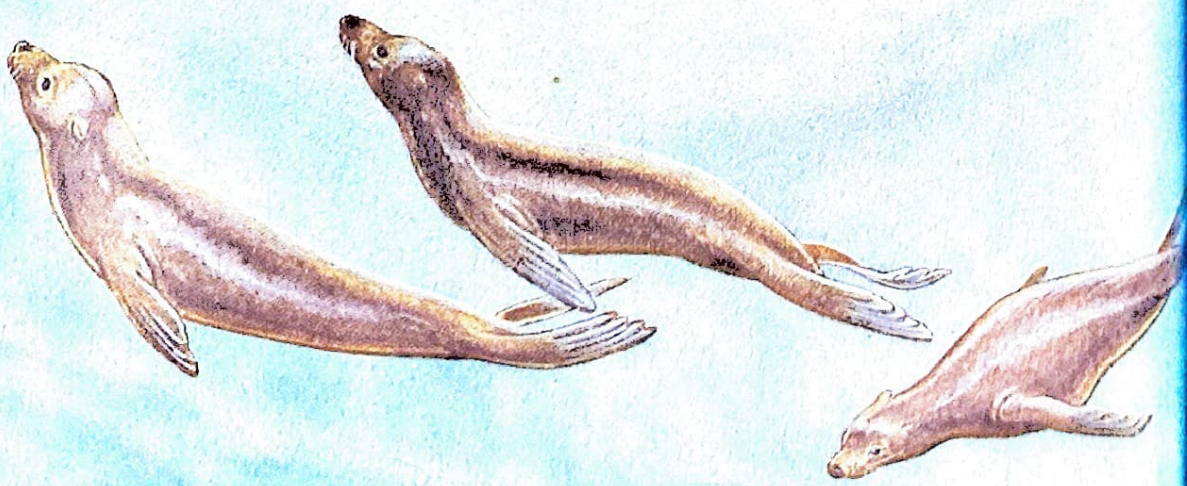


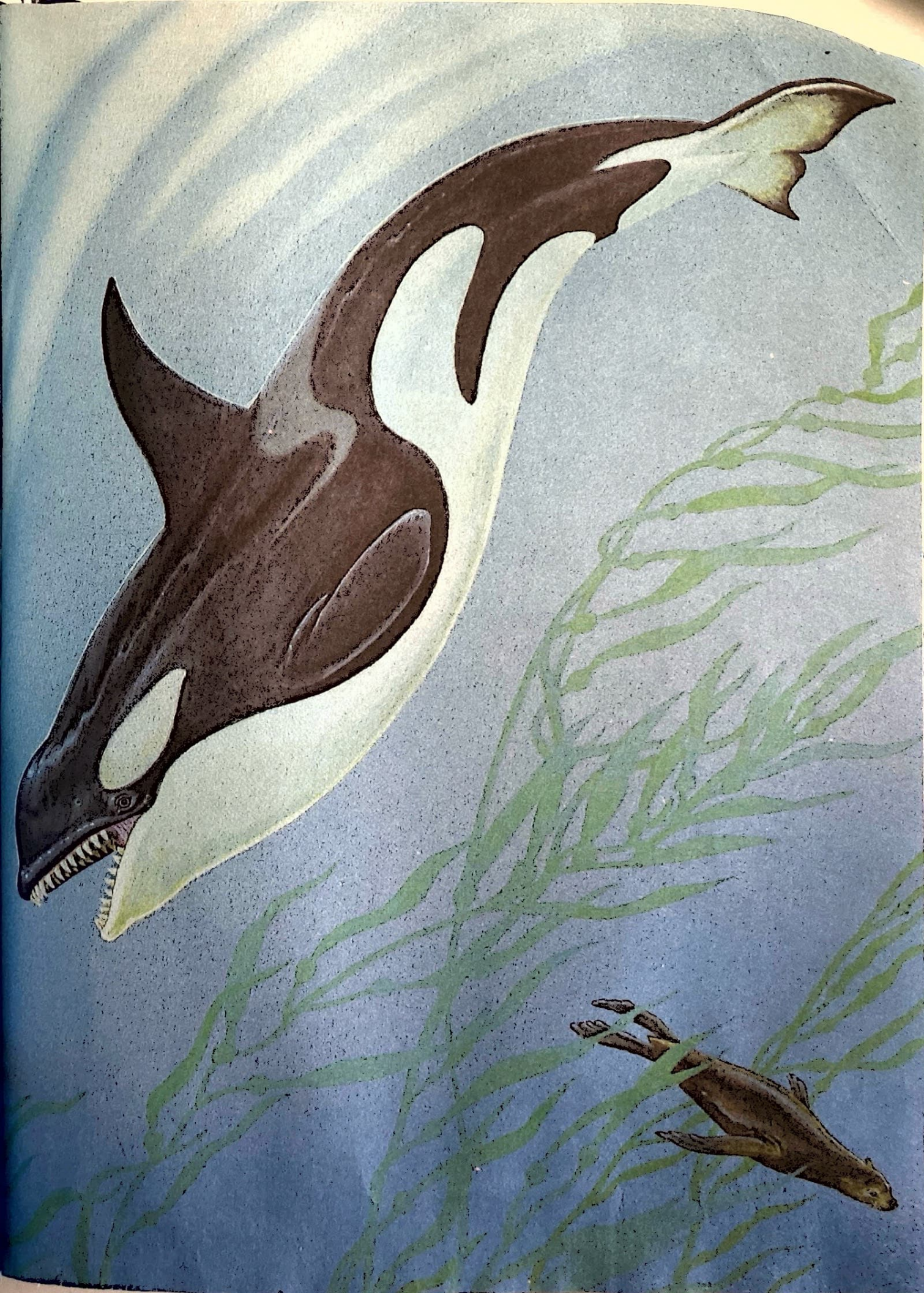
Humpback whales make
the strangest sounds of all.
They seem to be singing.
Humpbacks are funny looking.
Their heads are covered
with bumps.
But the songs they sing
are beautiful.

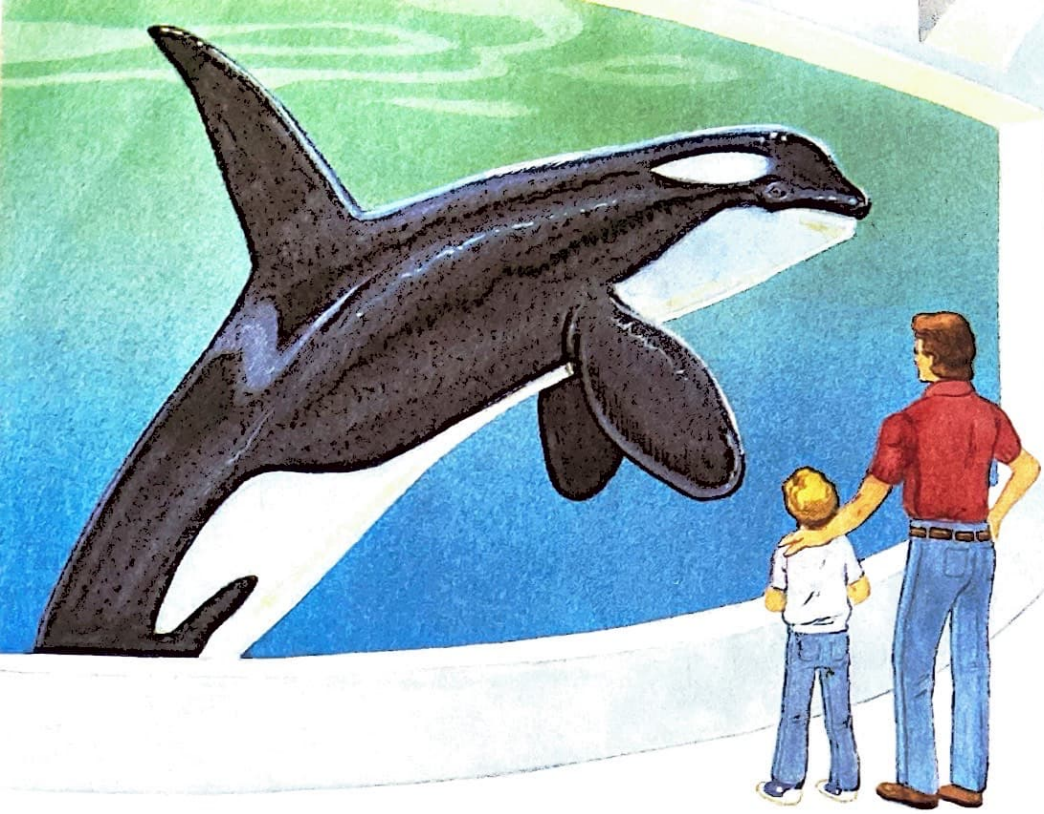


Scientists have even recorded
the songs of the humpbacks.
What do the songs mean?
So far scientists are not sure.

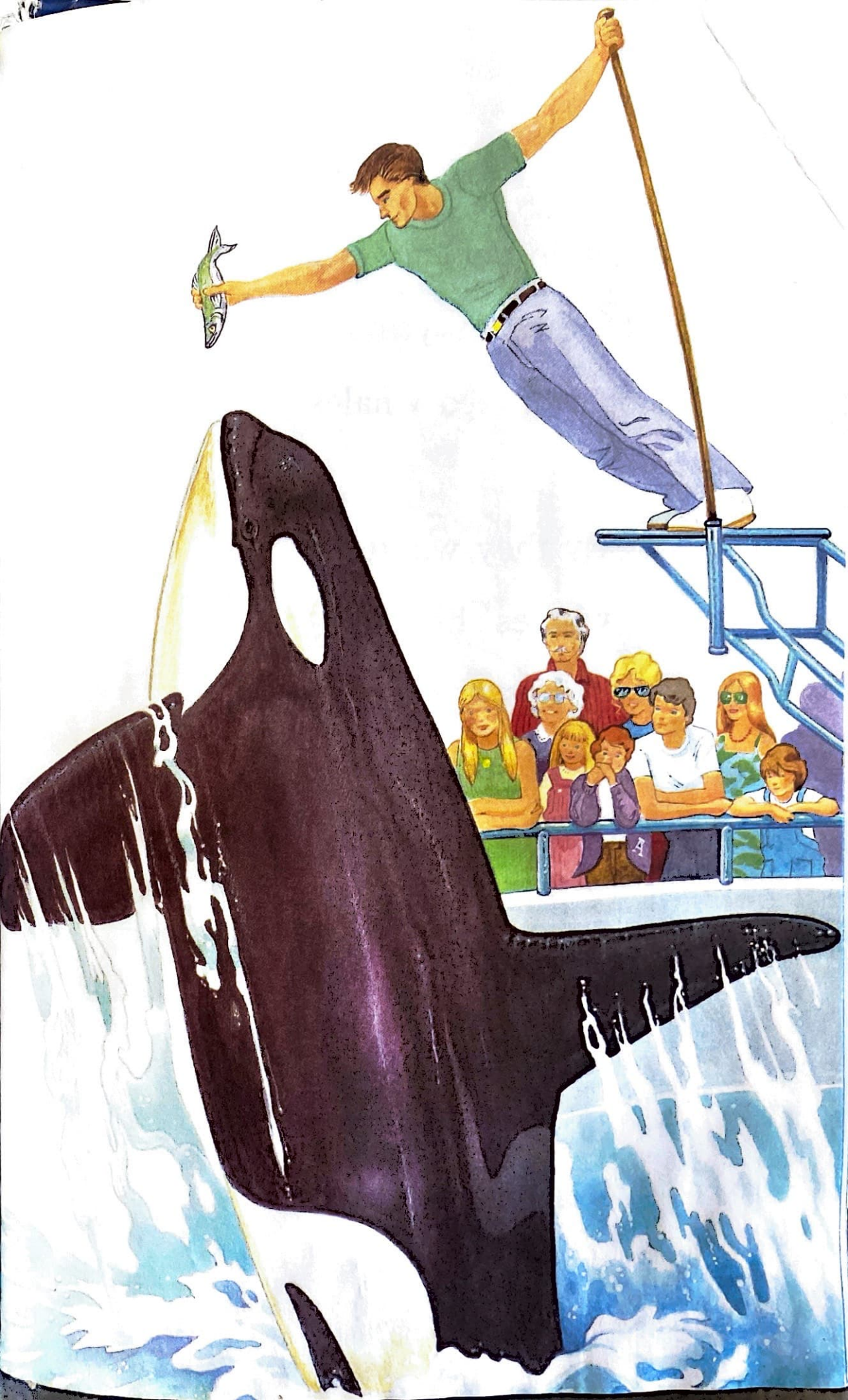
The most beautiful whale
is the black-and-white orca.
The orca does not have baleen.
It has real teeth—
big ones!
The orca hunts big fish.
It hunts seals, too.
It even hunts other whales.
Orcas are also called killer whales.
Sailors used to be
afraid of them.







Today we know that orcas
can become very tame.
Orcas are the stars
of many aquarium shows.
They like to be petted.
They love to do tricks.
Orcas are very smart.
Sometimes they even
make up tricks
and teach them to their trainers.



Orcas do not hunt people.
But for many years
people hunted whales.
Why?
Mostly they wanted
the whales' blubber.
Blubber is a kind of thick fat.
It can be made into oil.
Years ago whale oil
was burned in lamps.
That's how people lit their houses.
Ships spent many months at sea
looking for whales.

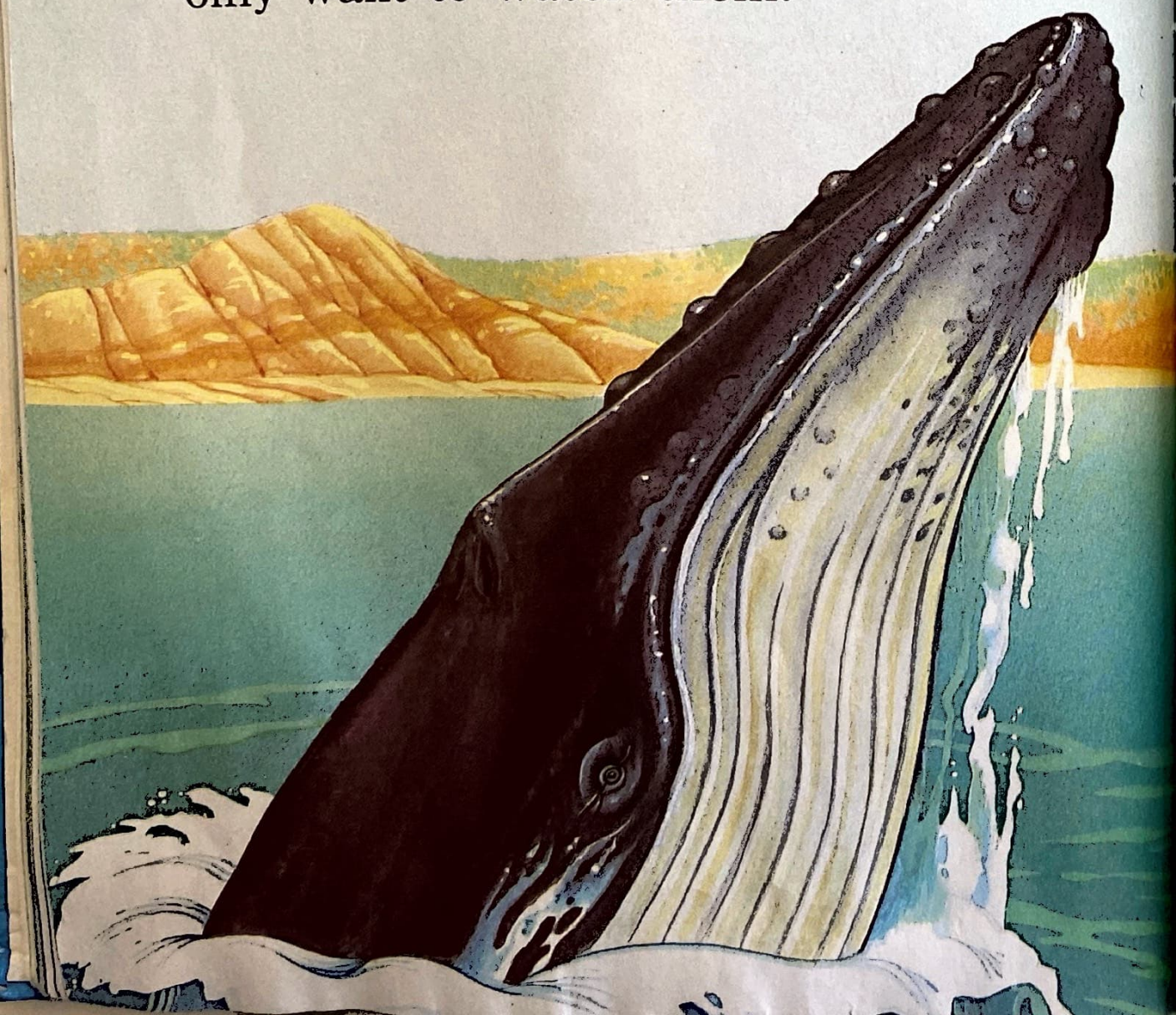
The hunters searched for whales
in the cold seas of the far north.
Sometimes the ships
got stuck in the ice.
Some never returned.

Hunting whales was dangerous work.
When they found a whale,
the hunters chased it
in small boats.
They threw long spears
called harpoons
into the whale's back.
The whale fought hard
to get away.

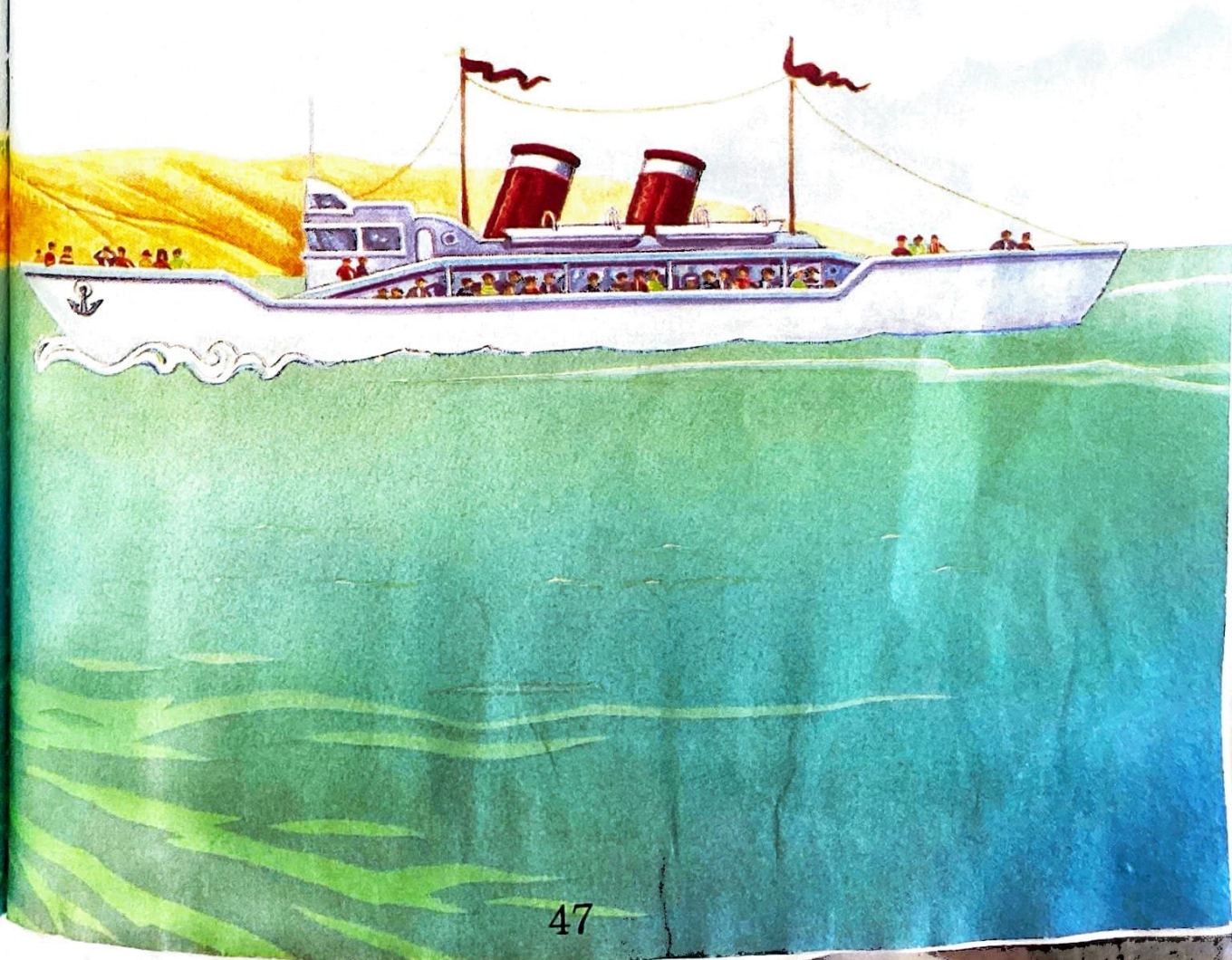
A frightened whale

could overturn a boat!

So many whales were killed
that few were left.
People started to worry
about saving the whales.
Laws were passed to protect whales.
Today most people who follow whales
only want to watch them.



Scientists watch whales
to learn about their lives
in the sea.
Whale watching is also fun.
Whales seem to like
watching people, too.
They will swim and play
around a boat for a long time.



If you go whale watching,

you might even see a whale

jump high in the air.

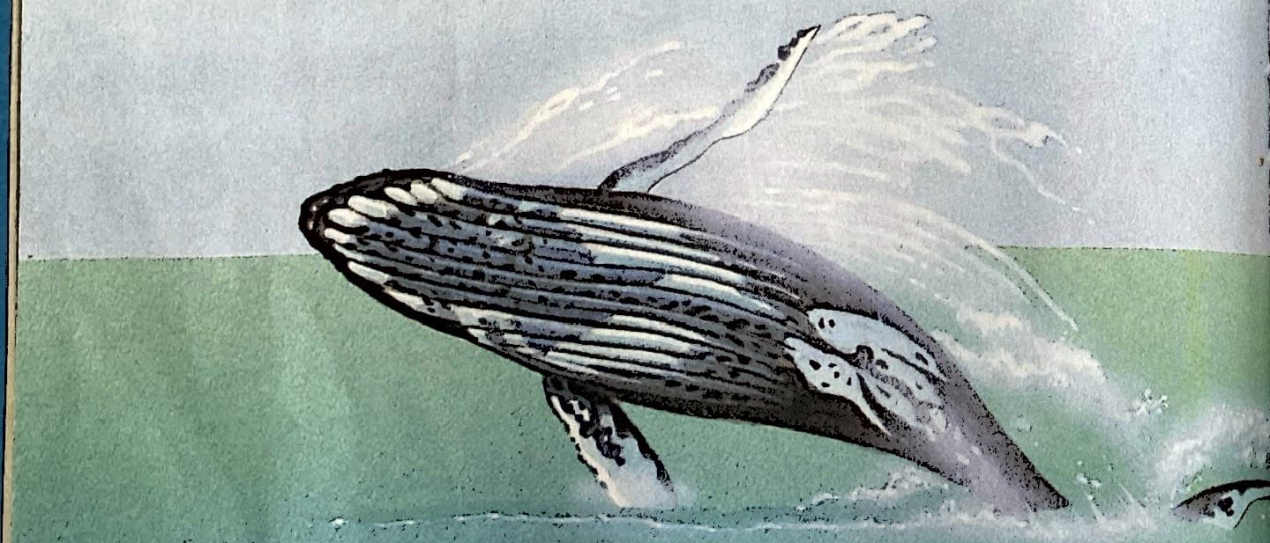
Why do whales jump?

No one knows.

Maybe they jump just because

it feels so good

to be a whale!



STEP 3

STEP INTO READING

reading on your own

It's time for YOU!
Pick your favorite spot to read.
This is going to be a great book!

What this book is about . . .

Whales: The Gentle Giants

Even the smallest whale is as big as a rowboat. Learn more facts about the giants of the deep when you read this book.

Learning to Read, Step by Step!

STEP 1 **Ready to Read** Preschool–Kindergarten

STEP 2 **Reading with Help** Preschool–Grade 1

STEP 3 **Reading on Your Own** Grades 1–3

Is your child comfortable tackling new words? Does your child like to read on his or her own? It's time for Step 3.

Engaging Characters • Easy-to-Follow Plots • Popular Topics

STEP 4 **Reading Paragraphs** Grades 2–3

STEP 5 **Ready for Chapters** Grades 2–4

To learn about all the Steps, turn to page 1.

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